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ABSTRACT

The paper describes the identification process and procedures developed in a project for gifted/talented handicapped children (3 to 5 years old) in six talent areas: intellectual, academic, creative, social/leadership, visual and performing arts, and psychomotor. Characteristics of two approaches (the informal open classroom and an approach based on Guilford's Structure of the Intellect) used to educate these children in a mainstream setting are delineated. The article also includes a discussion of the evaluation process used in the two approaches as well as parent involvement. (Author/SBH)

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PANEL 7

Identifying and Programming Young Gifted/Talented Handicapped Children

World Congress on Future Special Education
University of Stirling, Scotland
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10:30 - 12:00 noon

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Introduction

Genesis of the Project

In the Fall of 1975 the Institute for Child Behavior and Development at the University of Illinois received a grant from the Federal Bureau of Education for the Handicapped (BEH) to develop and demonstrate a model program for the "Retrieval and Acceleration of Promising Young Handicapped and Talented" (RAPYHT). Children from three to five years of age were included in the project, which is currently completing the last year of a three-year cycle.

Four concerns that were evident or emerging in the United States during the mid-seventies provided the impetus for this project. One such concern stemmed from the recognition that all children should receive educational programming at an early age. When Head Start, a federally funded program for children in low-income families, was initiated in 1965, the prevailing thinking was that the developmental lags of the children of poverty were the result of inadequate care and limited intellectual stimulation. Without data to substantiate the opposite corollary, educationists took for granted that children from more advantaged homes progressed at the maximal rate. Recently, however, research has made clear that children from middle-income families also profit from more stimulating experiences than are often provided at home, especially where mothers work. Thus has grown the commitment to early education for <u>all</u> children.

A second concern had to do with the expansion of services to handicapped children. The Bureau of Education for the Handicapped for the past eight years has financed the development and dissemination of exemplary programs for the young handicapped. In addition, Head Start now requires that ten percent of the children it serves be handicapped. Concurrently, many states now mandate programs for the young handicapped down to the age of three; some have extended the age downward to zero.

A third concern is the need for programs for the gifted, even though substantial federal funds have not been allocated to date. At the state level, however, there has been a steady increase in the number of programs for the gifted, especially in Illinois, Connecticut, California, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Pennsylvania, and North Carolina.

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Finally, a fourth concern has focused on the use of learning models for preschool programming. Typical of these are the Montessori model, Open Ed, the Structure of the Intellect Model (SOI) derived from Guilford, Piaget models, and behavior modification approaches. Indeed, the authors of the program I am discussing today had previously evaluated two of these approaches (Open Ed and the SOI model) with young gifted children from all socio-economic levels. Information derived from that study led us to believe that those models might also prove useful with talented/handicapped children. In addition, the authors, with BEH funding, had developed the PEECH model (Precise Early Education of Children with Handicaps), which has since been replicated in some twenty states. During the course of developing and disseminating PEECH, we had identified a number of handicapped children who appeared to be gifted and who might benefit from special programming. To validate this assumption, these gifted/handicapped children were placed in classrooms using two different approaches (Open Ed and Structured). This experience further convinced us of the need to develop more specific procedures for helping handicapped children fully express intellectual giftedness and other talents--artistic, musical, and physical.

Definition of Terms

Prior to the discussion of RAPYHT, two terms must be defined: gifted/talented and handicapped.

In the past, the term "gifted" has been reserved for the child who is academically, verbally, and/or intellectually talented and has generally excluded other talented children, those who are socially, artistically, or physically talented. In RAPYHT, however, the term "gifted/talented" applies to children with any of the above characteristics. Initially, most of the talented children identified by the project were academically, verbally, or intellectually talented. During the second and third years of the project, however, children with other talents began to be identified.

In RAPYHT the term "handicapped" is applied whenever a child's full development is impaired through sensory, social-emotional, and/or learning deficits. Typical sensory deficits include those associated with vision and hearing handicaps. The project serves the severely sensorily impaired--blind, deaf, or severely orthopedically handicapped children--by providing special materials to teachers in classrooms for the severely handicapped. Potentially gifted children with lesser handicaps are placed in demonstration/service project classrooms. Children with social-emotional deficits, those characterized by temper tantrums, bed-wetting, withdrawal, hyperaggressiveness, and/or other compatible symptomology, are clearly eligible for the project. Children with learning deficits displayed behavior indicating intra-individual growth and development patterns that differed significantly from area to area. These children are also included in project demonstration/service classrooms.

Principle Objectives of the Project

The overall goal of RAPYHT has been to develop and demonstrate two viable approaches for educating young talented handicapped children who are enrolled in programs that also serve gifted children with no handicaps, average children with no handicaps, and multi-handicapped children who are of higher but not

gifted ability. Thus, the project provides for talented/handicapped children in a mainstream setting. Since there are relatively small numbers of these children in any population, such a scheduling tactic is essential.

Although the specific objectives of the project are ten in number, only four of these will be reviewed here:

1. To adapt and demonstrate a screening program to identify young gifted/talented handicapped children.

2. To develop and disseminate programming procedures and curriculum materials for these children.

3. To adapt and disseminate procedures for evaluating these children in classroom settings in such areas as language interaction, social interaction, problem solving, risk taking, art.

4. To adapt and demonstrate a model for involving the families of young gifted/talented handicapped children.

Identifying the Young Gifted/Talented Handicapped Child

The identification of preschool talented/handicapped children is a complex process that begins when children are screened for placement in a preschool special education program and continues throughout the intervention period. Such an extended process is essential because the talents of the handicapped child may not be recognized during initial diagnosis; however, after several weeks or months of intervention, handicapping conditions may be remediated to the extent that previously hidden talents emerge. Thus RAPYHT relies on identification procedures that are part of initial screening and diagnosis as well as on procedures that are used with children already enrolled in programs.

RAPYHT is part of a larger program involving a joint agreement between the University, a regional educational service center, and fifteen school districts in the county. The larger program, the Joint Early Education Program for the Handicapped (JEEPH), locates children to be screened in the fifteen communities through a variety of techniques, including lists generated by local school principals, media announcements, flyers sent home with children in school, and a telephone census. Location activities in a given school district vary according to the size of the district, the mobility of its population, and the wishes of the administration.

All children located in the fifteen school districts are then screened by the Comprehensive Identification Process (CIP) to determine developmental delays in one or more of eight areas: cognitive, speech and language, fine motor, gross motor, vision, hearing, medical history, and socio-affective. A more detailed exploration of CIP appears in an article written by the developer, Richard Reid Zehrbach. The primary objective of this screening is to select children likely to be handicapped, although note is made of information obtained from parents or through observation of the child during screening that suggests potential talent. All children selected are then referred for detailed study by a team consisting of a psychologist, a speech clinician, and a social worker.

This interdisciplinary team assesses each child's performance on a battery of standardized instruments. In addition, the team notes characteristics which indicate talent in one or more of six areas: intellectual, academic, creative, leadership, visual and performing arts, and psychomotor. The information gathered by the team is then presented at a staffing where placement for the child is determined. Consensus as to whether each handicapped child is potentially or functionally talented is also determined at this time. Such children, with the consent of their parents, are placed directly in a RAPYHT classroom.

Not all children with talents are identified at the diagnostic stage. Some are identified only after they have been in a program that allowed their talents to emerge. Some of these children are identified through the use of Talent Checklists developed at RAPYHT to help teachers rate children in the six areas of talent previously listed. Children who receive high rankings in at least one talent area receive further follow up:

1. Teacher interviews are held by a psychologist and/or consultant for the gifted to collect specific anecdotal/observational data related to a child's potential talents that will clarify and informally validate the checklist ratings. A teacher interview form has been developed to structure the interview. At this stage of assessment, children may be screened out for a variety of reasons, for example, lack of teacher information to support the talent rating.

2. Individual child assessments offer a comprehensive evaluation of the child's abilities and rely on a variety of instruments and data sources. The specific assessment procedures vary according to the area of talent under investigation.

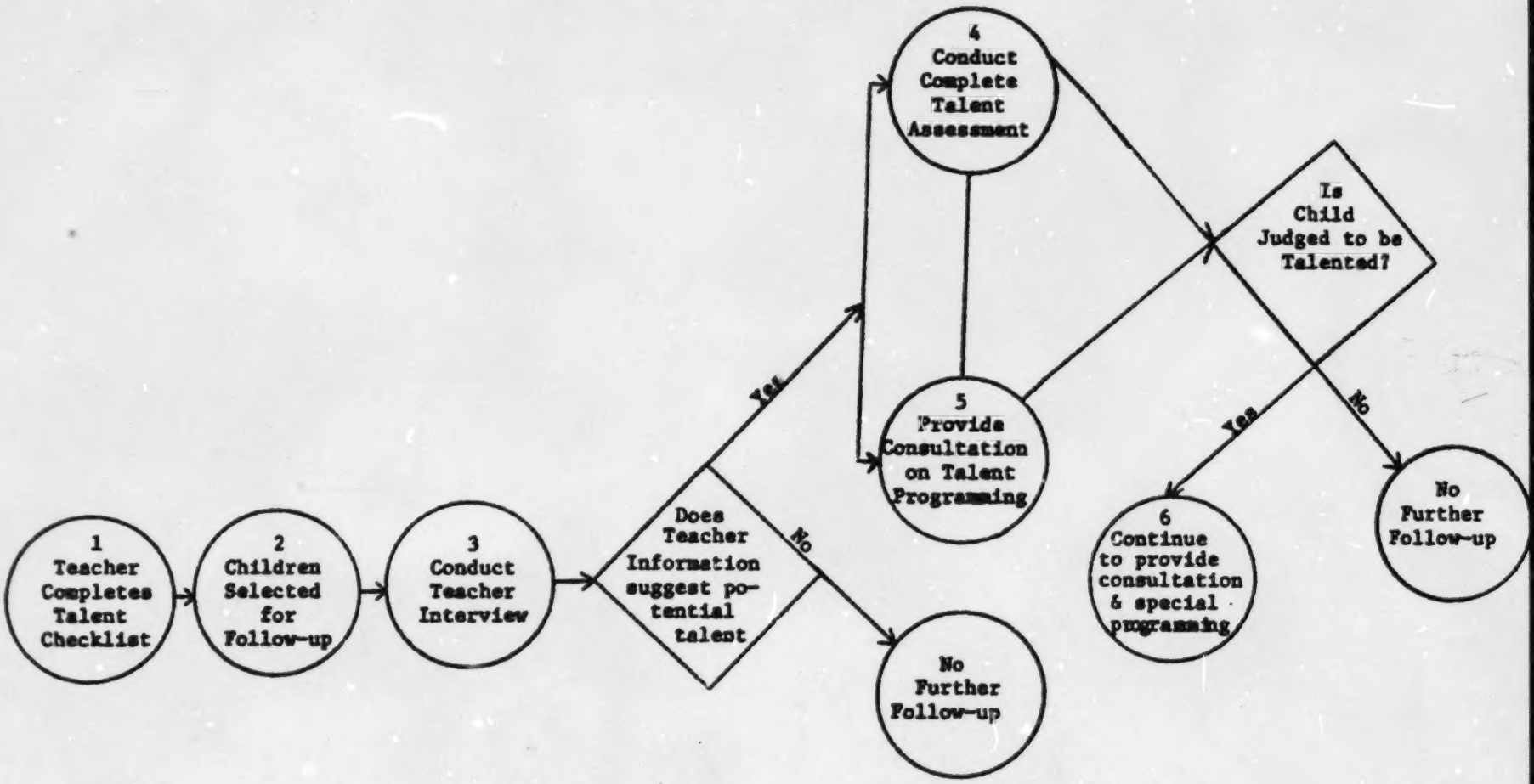
3. Consultation and trial programming are necessary because handicaps often obscure talents and because assessment does not always fully reveal ability. Teachers are, therefore, provided with talent development activities that provide optimum opportunities for children to express potential talents. Figure 1 presents a flow chart that summarizes the steps involved in identifying talented/handicapped preschoolers.

Finally, through a variety of dissemination activities RAPYHT heightens public awareness of services for talented/handicapped preschoolers. As a result, some referrals of children thought to be talented are received from service agencies, teachers, and other professionals working with young handicapped children. Specific follow-up procedures for these referrals are essentially the same as those used with children identified through the Talent Checklists.

Programming for the Gifted/Talented Handicapped Child

Authorities in the field of early childhood as well as experts in the field of the gifted agree that there is more than one viable approach for educating young children, including the nonhandicapped gifted, the handicapped gifted/talented, and the handicapped. RAPYHT relies on two approaches: the open classroom or informal approach and a more structured, teacher-directed approach based on Guilford's Structure of the Intellect and commonly referred to as the SOI model.

Figure 1. Flow Chart of Procedure for Identifying Talented-Handicapped Preschool Children Via Talent Checklists



Open Classroom or Informal Model

The environment of the RAPYHT informal classroom is organized so that children may become deeply involved in subjects or ideas that capture their interest. Classroom space and materials are deliberately made accessible to firsthand experiences of many kinds. The informality and open attitude of teachers affords children many and varied opportunities to interact with others in a natural way. Teachers support and respect the choices and decisions of the child and, thereby, help to enhance his/her sense of self-worth and direction. Through careful observation and attention to detail, the teacher learns a great deal about the child's understanding of him/herself in relation to the world. It is then possible for teachers to lead the natural learning process into purposeful activities in which the child faces and overcomes problems and shares the feelings and experiences of others.

Teachers in the open classroom believe that learning grows out of the human desire to influence and to adapt to the environment. Although parents and teachers define cultural and social expectations and share with the child a responsibility for adapting with some degree of success, it is the child who ultimately directs his or her own learning. It is the child who learns to explore, to inquire, to investigate, and to apply new knowledge and experience. The child is trusted to learn in his/her own way and time. By means of perceptive observation, quality interaction, and ongoing formative evaluation, the teacher participates in and enhances the child's learning process.

This approach represents an alternative to the more overt structure of the teacher-directed classroom. It offers an environment in which children share with teachers the responsibility for their own learning. A full range of activities is offered, materials are readily available, and teachers accept and extend the ideas for activities suggested by the children. In this way, teachers open many avenues through which children can express themselves, gain recognition, develop self-esteem, and act on the environment with both success and personal satisfaction. Instead of waiting to be told what to do, children gain experience in directing their own actions. The following principles are endorsed by teachers in open classrooms:

1. Learning is developmentally-oriented.

2. Learning is making decisions.

3. Learning is dialogue.

4. Learning is integrating knowledge.

5. Learning is acting on the environment.

Informal teaching is not an abdication of adult control but a deliberate sharing of control with children. It is a search for the cognitive processes children use in order to anticipate what resources to make available to them so that learning is extended and elaborated. Through careful observation, a sound basis is developed for judging when adult intervention is appropriate

and for determining what kinds of suggestions, questions, and elaborations will best stimulate a particular child. In contrast to a teacher-directed approach, activities in the informal classroom are teacher/child directed, the teacher and the child share the responsibility for learning.

SOI-Based Classroom

The SOI classroom is shaped by several tenets about children and teaching. First, children with special needs require special programming and develop optimally in structured but flexible teacher-directed classrooms. Individualized planning based on diagnostic information is at the core of the program, but unstructured time is considered necessary to certain aspects of child development that are highly valued--individuality, initiative, and interaction with other children. A second tenet is that children learn in a wide variety of ways. For this reason, two instructional models are used. The ITPA model, derived from the Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities, defines language processing skills in ten areas. The SOI model, on the other hand, delineates intellectual abilities in 120 sub-areas and is organized along three dimensions: content, operation, and product. The content dimension contains four subcategories: semantic, symbolic, figural, and behavioral. The operation dimension is divided into nine parts: cognition memory, convergent production, divergent production, classes, relations, systems, transformations, and implications. The product dimension is subdivided into units, classes, relations, systems, transformations and implications. Although the two models complement each other, the SOI is the main instructional model, while the ITPA is used for further evaluation and to foster language development.

Daily activities in the classroom are examined to determine which cells of the SOI model are being emphasized. Data from these evaluations are analyzed, and an effort is made to increase the number of activities drawn from the less used areas. Teachers observe each other in the classroom and record statements and questions of both children and staff in terms of the operations of the model. When analyzed, this information provides the staff with feedback on their approaches to teaching. In this way, the SOI model is used for inservice training.

The daily schedule is built around flexibly arranged components that focus on particular aspects of the SOI model. Goals for children are stated in terms of the six talent areas: intellectual, academic, creative, leadership, visual and performing arts, and psychomotor; and six developmental areas: language, math, gross motor, fine motor, social, and self-help. Each child is considered to have intra-individual differences that may represent potential talents or developmental deficits or handicaps.

To stimulate children and to broaden their interests, teachers use a combination of presentation methods: they may present materials in a planned activity, arrange materials in a display or at a learning center for children to approach on their own initiative, put materials into individualized work envelopes, offer materials as one of several options, or informally suggest materials in response to an interest indicated by the child. Similarly, combinations of approaches and resources are used to solve interpersonal

and behavioral problems including positive reinforcement, group discussion, input from parents and ancillary personnel, restructuring or reevaluating expectations, and planned activities that expand behavioral awareness.

Evaluating the Gifted/Talented Handicapped Child in the Classroom

The general steps for setting objectives, charting progress, and evaluating accomplishments in both programs may be summarized as follows:

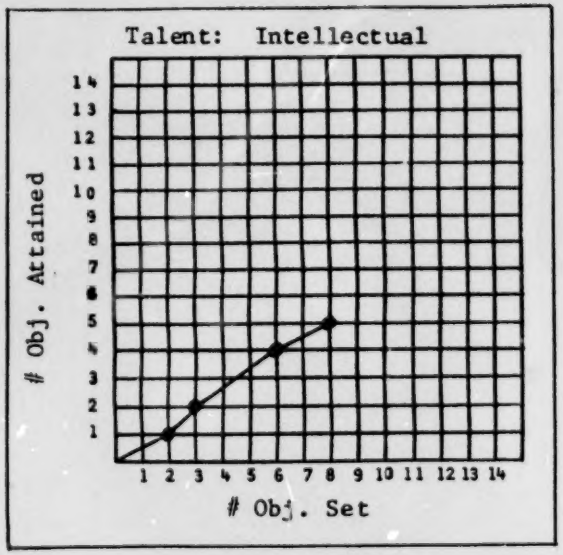
1. The child is diagnosed by the team and placed in a classroom. At this time the child's talents and deficits are defined and general goals are written.

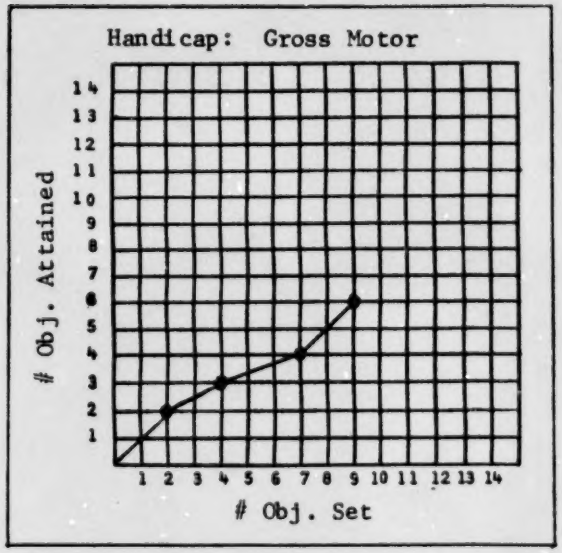
2. A systematic observation, assessment, and programming procedure (SCOAP) developed at the University of Illinois is used to determine the child's functioning in six developmental areas: language, math, gross motor, fine motor, social, and self-help. Lags as well as acceleration in development are determined. During this diagnostic period, trial teaching activities are presented. Near the end of the period, Talent Checklists are administered to help determine if additional talents can be identified.

3. At the end of the diagnostic period, Individual Education Plans are prepared for each child which set goals and objectives for each area of talent and handicap for a semester. Information obtained through classroom assessment is supplemented with information from the diagnostic team and the child's parents. SOI objectives tend to be based on periods of one to seven days and are often formulated through referral to the SOI model. In the open classroom, objectives tend to be of longer duration, up to a month in length.

4. The Individual Education Plans in the SOI classroom are implemented through weekly lesson plans for groups of children engaged at the same time in similar activities. Expectations differ, of course, but the lesson plans are directly related to the objectives in the Individual Educational Plans. Criterion actitivies to measure the attainment of these objectives are included in the plans. If an activity is to eliminate or minimize a handicap as well as to foster a talent, these objectives are stipulated on the worksheet. For example, "The child will hold a pencil in an appropriate grasp (fine motor handicap) and draw three different symbols (divergent thinking talent)." In the open classroom, on the other hand, teachers make plans for involving children, for provisioning the classroom, and for interacting with children. Criteria for attainment are based on the observation of naturally occurring behaviors directly related to written objectives.

5. In the SOI classroom, weekly charts are prepared to show each child's progress. The charts are based on the number of objectives attained compared to the number set during the time period. Each child has at least three charts, one for each area of talent, one for each area of deficit, and one for other developmental areas. Figure 2 shows charts for a child who is talented in the intellectual area and has a gross motor deficit. In the open classroom, each child's progress is charted on a monthly basis. Charts are similar to those for children in the SOI classroom; however, fewer numbers are entered because the objectives cover longer periods of time.





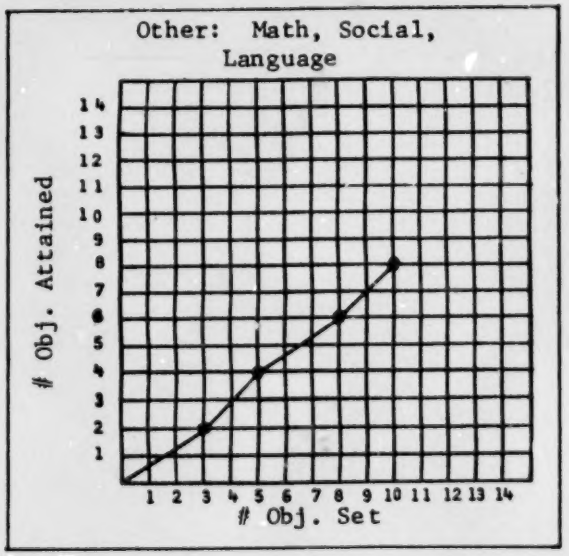


Figure 2. Example of Progress Charts for a child in the SOI classroom who is talented in the Intellectual area and has a gross motor deficit. Other goal areas for this child are mathematics, social development, and language.

6. Finally, a battery of standardized tests is administered on a pre-post basis and provides information on the progress of each child in important areas of development:

Stanford-Binet, Form L-M
McCarthy Scales of Children's Abilities (motor scale)
Developmental Test of Visual Motor Integration
ITPA-Verbal Expression subtest
Vineland Social Maturity Scale
Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test
Zimmerman Preschool Language Scale
Leach Interrogation Model (JHSD, 1972, 37, 33-46)
Goldman-Fristoe Test of Articulation
Language sample - MLR, MSLR, DSS/DST (Lee, L. Developmental Sentence Analysis, Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1974), Semantics Interpretations (Brown, R., A First Language, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1973).

Exceptions are made, however, and other instruments are used when, due to handicapping conditions, one or more of the above instruments do not provide a valid measure of a child's abilities.

Involving the Family of the Young Gifted/Handicapped Child

The RAPYHT approach to parents insists that family members be treated positively, flexibly, individually, humanistically, and accountably. The approach is positive because staff members help family members become aware of alternatives that will promote desired behaviors rather than dwelling on problems, which often results in self-defeating behaviors.

The approach is flexible because parents are involved in more than one way, for example, a parent might work a certain number of hours each week in the classroom and also serve on the advisory board and/or work on the newsletter. An article which more fully develops the concept of flexibility in working with parents is found in Karnes, Merle B. and Zehrbach, R. Reid, "Flexibility in Getting Parents Involved in the School," Teaching Exceptional Children, Fall, 1972, 6-19.

The approach is individualized because work with each family is based on the needs and strength of that family. For example, some parents may be encouraged to attend group meetings while other more reticent and less confident parents are visited at home. Gradually, parents in this latter group may elect to enter group activities.

The approach is humanistic because family members are encouraged and expected to take part to the degree that they feel able. It is recognized on one hand that parents have the right to refuse to participate in plans suggested for them and their child. On the other hand, parents must be informed fully and carefully about alternatives if they are to have a real choice.

Teachers or other staff members may suggest goals that a parent does not like. At the same time, if they do not inform the parent of alternatives, they are guilty of omitting an action, just as they would be guilty of committing inappropriate acts if they became over zealous in their efforts to intervene.

The approach is accountable because records are kept of parental involvement. A Family Involvement Record as well as other forms provide a means of recording goals and activities based on needs identified by parents and/or staff and of documenting progress toward the accomplishment of each goal.

Anticipated Impact

Hopefully, RAPYHT, through planned dissemination procedures, will promote improved identification of and programming for young gifted/talented handicapped children. This segment of our population deserves to receive more attention than has been given them. The disability of the handicapped has received attention, but all too often their gifts and talents have been ignored. RAPYHT should make the general public as well as practitioners aware of the needs of this small but significant segment of the handicapped population.

Products generated in the project can be used in programs for talented young handicapped children throughout the nation regardless of the delivery system and regardless of how small the number of such children at a given site may be. Finally, when we improve the programming for one segment of the population in a class, that improvement almost invariably has positive effects on the other children in the class.